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AUTHOR Beall, Melissa L.
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ABSTRACT

In recognition of the importance of communication skills to all students, a communication skills program is being developed and implemented in the Lincoln, Nebraska, public school system. Since teaching itself is communication, an important goal of the program is to improve and enhance the communication effectiveness of teachers as well as students. Until recently there has been very little research on the assumed relationship between teacher effectiveness and communication skills, and the research that has been done is often on an abstract level. Yet in spite of this lack of an adequate data base, five goals of the Lincoln program stress the commonalities of communication competence and the competent teacher. These goals are: (1) to humanize education, (2) to provide teachers with a new perspective for teaching their subject matter to their students, (3) to provide opportunities for students to gain communication competence, (4) to make students and teachers aware of their own communication appropriateness and effectiveness, and (5) to reinforce the idea that the quiet classroom with the teacher as center will not always facilitate maximum learning. As the results of current research become available, new inservice and teacher training programs will help create more effective teaching. (JL)

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# COMMUNICATION COMPETENCE AND TEACHING: AN INTERFACE

Melissa L. Beall
Lincoln Southeast High School
Lincoln, Nebraska

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COMMUNICATION COMPETENCE AND TEACHING: AN INTERFACE

Since the advent of accountability, there has been a greater emphasis upon what students need to know and how educators can best provide that which is needed. Federal legislation had mandated that schools provide instruction in the basic skills, including speaking and listening. The demands of career, society and personal communication needs indicate that every person must be provided instruction so that s/he may gain "communication competence" during her/his school years, in order to be able to cope with the demands of life. Book (1980) states that "Communication needs permeate our legislation, society, careers, and personal lives, and all that can be done to increase the communication competence of the secondary level students should be done."

Backlund (1978) has defined communication competence as: "The ability to demonstrate a knowledge of the socially appropriate communicative behavior in a given situation." The National Project on Speech Communication Competencies (Allen and Brown, 1976) identified five major functions of communication and described the development of communication competence in children. The competent communicator is capable of performing a wide variety of communication acts involving both verbal and nonverbal behaviors (Allen and Wood, 1978).

What common ground is shared by "communication competence" and teaching? This paper will attempt to answer that question by looking at what one school district is attempting in a Communication Skills Program, discuss the literature on teaching and teacher competence, and pull from both the commonalities.

In the summer of 1978 the Lincoln (Nebraska) Public Schools organized curriculum and assessment committees to develop plans for establishing graduation requirements and instructional programs related to eight "life skills" goals. Three of those goals contained the word "communicate": "Communicate effectively using the skill of reading;" "Communicate effectively using the skill of writing;" and, "Communicate effectively using the skills of speaking, observing and listening." The latter goal was incorporated in the "learnings required in the tenth grade English program." Of the fifteen learnings established, nine are directly related to speaking, listening and observing:

6. Use words and pronunciation appropriate for the situation.
7. Identify main ideas in messages.
8. Express ideas and give directions clearly, concisely, and accurately.
9. Ask and answer questions accurately and effectively to give and get information.
11. Communicate to convince others.
12. Communicate to give form to experience.
13. Organize messages so others can understand them.
14. Recognize when another does not understand one's message.
15. Express feelings to others appropriately.

The following year a resource guide was written and disseminated which provided tenth grade English teachers with specific information regarding the utilization of speaking and listening in the English classroom. In addition, it was decided that the English Study should include "Communication Skills" as a major area of emphasis, during the 1980-82 school years. While results of this study committee's work are not yet in, a number of decisions have been made which have impact upon the instructional system.

Lincoln's communication skills program provides opportunities for all students, Pre-Kindergarden through Twelfth grades, to gain the ability to give or interchange information, thoughts and feelings. These are skills they will need all their lives. Specifically emphasized are speaking, listening, observing (perceiving), and nonverbal skills. It is a given that people are constantly communicating. Since this is so, it serves our students well to provide opportunities to become more proficient, in order to cope with and in today's society. These skills include speaking and understanding spoken English, making judgments about messages and their effects, building and maintaining personal relationships, resolving conflicts, and selecting and arranging message elements to produce messages others understand. (This information is taken from the purpose statement in the as-yet-unpublished TARGET: COMMUNICATION SKILLS GUIDE, LINCOLN PUBLIC SCHOOLS.)

The Communication Skills Program includes speaking, listening and observing as well as nonverbal communication in all subject areas. The interdisciplinary intent of the program was determined necessary in order to provide all students with the opportunities to gain communication skills. Once this program is fully developed, piloted, implemented, and a base for communication instruction is provided, it is recommended that communication requirements in terms of specific classes for all students be initiated. At this stage, the program is concerned with making people aware of their communication effectiveness. Among the intents of the program are to provide instruction in the analysis of appropriateness and effectiveness of communication for specific audiences, the use and analysis of various

media messages, the exploration of cultural influences which inhibit and enhance speaking, listening and observing behaviors, and critical thinking skills as they affect the internal composition of the externalized message, either verbal or nonverbal. Evaluation of student ability is by teacher evaluation guided by subjective/holistic, or objective/analytic means. Learnings are assessed in a variety of ways: (a) using a checklist format; (b) with a formal assessment instrument such as evaluation forms, charts, or scales; (c) with paper and pencil tests or activities; and, (d) with task or situation activities. The curriculum encourages increased opportunities for student communication, more classroom time allotted for student-centered talk, and less time in teacher-centered talk. It supports open questioning by students and less teacher-led discussion directed toward a specific "answer." Existing curriculum guides are utilized in providing goals for communication skills learnings. The communication skills program is a utilization and formalization of existing instruction. A broad, general structure is provided with enough specificity to accommodate the various teaching/learning styles of students and teachers. This implies a holistic approach with atomistic elements so that teachers are able to utilize different teaching styles, teaching strategies, and methods of grouping or individualizing students according to students' and teachers' needs. Inservice workshops are provided to offer suggestions for implementing the communication skills program. Among the skills for teachers which are inserviced are those of questioning so that teachers may become aware of how to effectively ask questions and allow time (as well as

determine how much time to allow for student response) so that students are able to effectively think and respond.

One of the goals of the inservice is to "humanize education." Rather than add to an already full schedule of the teachers, the program will benefit the teachers by providing a new perspective for teachers in order that they may provide communication skills learnings in their own classrooms. Teachers are encouraged to use various instructional models: the quiet classroom with the teacher as center, all of the time, will not always facilitate maximum student learning, particularly of communication skills development. The program complements existing writing and reading programs, and is correlated with thinking skills and cognitive developmental levels. The work done by the Speech Communication Association's National Project on Speech Communication Competence (1976) and the SCA Task Force which developed the Guidelines for Minimal Competencies in Speaking and Listening (1978) were utilized in the development of the program.

While the thrust of the program is first to improve and enhance the communication skills of the students in the Lincoln Public Schools, the program will also improve and enhance the communication skills of Lincoln's teachers. Teaching is communication, according to many researchers and scholars in education. This we believe. It is not the intent of the Lincoln program to have all subject-matter specialists become teachers of speech communication, as there are skills and learnings which students can only gain from those persons who were specially trained in speech communication. Those skills and learnings will remain the realm

of the speech communication teacher. This program is designed to benefit students, teachers, administrators, parents, and the community, as we provide opportunities to become more effective in our communicative efforts. Administrators, parents and community members benefit because of the opportunities provided in the classroom, and because of the communication efforts of the school and the communication skills committee to "let people know what is happening in Lincoln's educational programs."

Workshops for pilot teachers will be conducted in the summer of 1981, piloting will occur in the 1981-82 school year, with in-servicing throughout the year, and with monthly feedback sessions so that pilot teachers, consultants, and the communication skills study committee may refine the program prior to city-wide inservicing and implementation. Once implementation occurs and has been evaluated, it is likely that communication classes will become a part of the students' requirements for graduation. When graduation requirements were recently discussed, all subject areas had committees established to determine what kinds of things were important for all students to know, and what skills were necessary for students in order that they might be more effective in whatever roles they play in the world. In every case, communication and communication skills were ranked as either first or second in importance. There is support for requiring communication classes, but with the economic situation as it is, administrators are loathe to hire new teachers to staff the schools in order to provide required communication courses unless they see that the classes are supported and will accomplish what is necessary. This program is the first step in that direction. While much work has been completed, much remains to be done. One of the exciting challenges of the program is to "sell" it--first to the teachers

of Lincoln, then to the students. Community and college/university groups have been invited to numerous reporting meetings. Their feedback has been sought and their comments have been considered as the program moves toward pilot implementation.

The Lincoln program provides a program which emphasizes communication skills and delivers learnings throughout the curriculum. It is felt that everyone concerned will benefit. The concept of "humanizing education" and providing different perspectives for the teaching of all subject matter has been enthusiastically received by administrators, particularly, and by the teachers themselves, once they overcome some initial fears concerning getting another responsibility when they are already overloaded. The goal to provide learnings to help students gain communication competence should also have the effect of helping teachers gain communication competence.

Teaching

Researchers have for years ascribed to the notion that teachers must be able to communicate well. Communication researchers are aware that communication involves much more than merely speaking well. Researchers dealing with the teaching-learning process have pointed up the need for research in the area of classroom interactions. Numerous writers have posited the idea that communication scholars have the unique ability to improve the quality of teaching. Research in classroom communication has promise of providing much needed information for the training of teachers as well as input for improvement in the teaching-learning process.

A teacher who is perceived as communicating effectively is perceived as an effective teacher. Since teaching involves constant communication and is a process which is contiguous to and a part of the

the teaching-learning process, few deny the importance of communication in the classroom. The data-base indicating the type of behaviors which are exhibited by the teacher who is perceived as communicating well are minimal. Much of the work which has taken place in this area has occurred at a highly abstract level. If we go back to Backlund's definition of communication competence, we educe that the teacher who is effective (and thus who is a competent communicator) must "demonstrate a knowledge of the socially appropriate communicative behavior" in the classroom situation. McNeil and Popham (1973) define the competent teacher, generally, as "one who is able to produce specified changes in learners." Many writers, reviewers and researchers have concluded that communication skills lead to a determination of the teacher's competence. Bendig (1955) stated that a large vocabulary and fluent language capacity was essential in order for teachers to be highly rated as competent. Kulik and McKeachie (1975) found that the style of individual teachers affects their ratings and that when the same instructor teaches the same course to similar students in differing sections, ratings will differ between sections. They concluded, from their review of teacher effectiveness literature, that the teacher who is rated as effective differs from the noneffective teacher on measures of communicative ability. The highly rated teacher isverbally fluent and strikes students and peers as cultured, sophisticated, expressive and enthusiastic. Items describing the effective communicator are prominent in the evaluative scales of most student rating forms. Such items are so salient, according to their reviews of the literature, that while the items are labeled "competence," "skill," and so on, they

have also been labeled "communication" or, "teacher's presentation." Such items account for approximately fifty percent of the ratings, and lead Kulik and McKeachie to make the point that "The good teacher is a good talker."

A problem exists, however, with such statements. First, we do not have the data-base to specifically indicate that a teacher's communication image does relate to effectiveness. Second, the research has been done at a highly abstract level. If we are to empirically determine that the teacher who communicates well is also perceived as more effective and is able to facilitate learning which occurs in the classroom, it is imperative that we reduce those inferences to a lower level.

Lynn (1976) says that contemporary educational literature generally acknowledges that the essence of teaching is communication. She goes on to state that educational theorists recongize that speaking and listening are fundamental to classroom interaction, that teaching involves a spontaneous element of communication between teacher and student, and that the teacher and student are linked in a system of reciprocal communication.

Research in recent years has led such eminent researchers as Gage, et. al. (1963), McKeachie and Kulik (1975), Kulik and McKeachie (1975), and Adams (1971) to state that "...communication is a basic element,..." and that the teacher controls the communication through which the student is influenced, and thus it is important to determine the correlates of teaching perceptions.

According to the competency models and program guidelines recommended by the Speech Communicaton Association and the American Theatre Association for the preparation of elementary and secondary teachers in speech communication and theatre (1978), the teacher fulfills five roles:

A. Model of Behavior

B. Facilitator of Learning

C. Resource Person

D. Participant in the Profession

E. Change Agent

The same document describes the communication and theatre goals with respect to teacher's own behaviors and the behaviors of their students as follows:

A. Effective communication in a variety of contexts

B. Aesthetic valuing and sensitive responses to artistic experience

C. Accurate prediction of the consequences of communication decisions and behaviors

D. Management of essential factors in communication situations, such as selection, development and presentation of ideas, strategies and media to influence human behavior

E. Message evaluation on the basis of functional, ethical and aesthetic considerations.

F. Development of a personal communication style which can be appropriately adapted to a variety of communication contexts.

G. Participation in a democratic society (including freedom of artistic expression), through the development of specific skills and attitudes which promote free inquiry, critical listening, receptiveness toward divergent viewpoints, and willingness to support (functionally or artistically) an unpopular idea.

H. Facilitation of intercultural communication through increased sensitivity to similarities and differences among groups, through appropriate applications of the principles and processes of interpersonal communication, and through aesthetic values.

B. F. Skinner advocates that the teacher is "a specialist in human behavior, whose assignment is to bring about extraordinarily complex changes in extraordinarily complex material."[1] Webb (1971) indicates that it is the relationship of the teacher and the student which greatly influences the teaching-learning process:

> The way a teacher behaves, not what he knows, may be the most important issue in the transmission of the teaching-learning exchanges. The psychological behavior, the quality of how the teacher relates to the child, is perhaps the most important basis for the learning attitude held by the child.

Dunkin and Biddle (1974) and Brophy and Good (1974) suggest that the relationships among the students' and the teacher's behaviors co-vary and influence one another in the classroom. R. G. Martin (1971) asked teacher educators to consider that the educational research advances have only "nibbled at the edges of a greater problem, the nature of human communication,...if teaching implies communication, then we cannot ignore the latter and expect a realistic account of the former."

It seems apparent that additional research in the area of the teacher's classroom communication behavior needs to be undertaken if we are to have an understanding of the effects of the teaching-learning process, and if we are to determine what behaviors constitute an effective communicator who is able to bring about changes in the students in the classroom. Unfortunately, the research to this point has not identified specific behaviors which can be observed in the classroom interactions. While communication researchers have identified dimensions of teacher communication style or image (Norton, 1977----1980, and Knutson, 1980), no one has yet identified the behaviors associated with those dimensions. While it is useful to know that a teacher who communicates well may be perceived as "dynamic" it would be more helpful to deermine the specific behaviors which lead students and others to label a teacher as "dynamic" or "restrained" or whatever. Such work is

currently underway. Until the data has been analyzed, suffice it to say that specifics as are yet unidentified.

Communication competence is a capability that can be learned by all. Students will be gaining opportunities to improve and enhance their own communication effectiveness, and teachers and others will also gain opportunities to become more effective. In the classrooms, teachers are constantly involved in the communication process, just as they are outside the classroom. While there is intuitive support for the notion that the teacher who communicates well is more effective in producing desired changes in students' behaviors, there is not yet support in an empirical data-base. This area is a fertile one for communication education research. The answers to questions raised, a determination of specific behaviors associated with effective communication, and empirical testing of those behaviors in the classrooms offers hope in finding answers to the significant questions which have been asked for well over a hundred years" "What is a 'good' teacher?" "What makes teachers 'effective'?"

An Interface

Communication competence and the competent teacher share a number of commonalities, among them: (1) "The ability to demonstrate a knowledge of the socially appropriate communicative behavior in a given situation." (2) The SCA-ATA document utilized by NCATE to evaluate teacher education programs (1978) describes eight goals for teachers and their students. (3) In the Lincoln Public Schools, the communication skills program provides in-service workshops for teachers which

designed to (a) humanize education, (b) provide teachers with a new perspective for teaching their subject matter to students as well as (c) provide opportunities for students to gain communication competence, and (d) make students and teachers aware of their own communication appropriateness and effectiveness, as well as (e) reinforce the idea that the quiet classroom with the teacher as center will not always facilitate maximum learning.

Programs such as the one in Lincoln will help teachers to be more aware of their own communication and help them provide more opportunities for students' communication skills development. While the goal is to help students gain communication competence, a derived benefit is that the teachers at all grade levels and in all subject matters are given opportunities to assess their own effectiveness as communicators. This is possible because the Lincoln Public Schools Administration perceives the need for all to communicate effectively, and because teachers in the district identified communication skills as a basic skill needed by all people (prior to the passage of the Elementary-Secondary Education Act of 1978 which identified speaking and listening as basic skills).

Implications for the future:

Certain roles and goals have been identified for teachers, and specific competencies for students have been identified and in some cases implemented in programs to develop communication skills. Research in progress needs to be analyzed, evaluated, and the results tested to determine the specific behaviors that teachers need to exhibit in order to be at least perceived as competent communicators in the classroom.

Once these behaviors have been identified. Longitudinal research can be conducted which will allow us to determine if indeed the notion that the teacher who is an effective communicator is effective in producing desired, specific changes in his/her students. When this has been accomplished, we shall have made much progress toward gaining an understanding of "effective teaching" and "teacher competence." The high school classroom is the ideal setting for this kind of research, and many teachers are eager to learn what can make them more effective in the classroom. Administrators, too, are eager to have concrete criteria upon which to base their decisions for tenure and retention of teachers in the classrooms. Research in this area can only help everyone concerned. Once we have this information, we can provide in-servicing for teachers already in the field, and provide specifics for teacher trainees.